Buckwheat in 2000 Cropping Season

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Introduction

With the continuous wet cropping season that much of Ontario is experiencing, some fields have not been planted and growers are looking for alternative, short season crops that can still be planted later then most crops. Several growers have inquired about growing buckwheat. Buckwheat can be used as a short season crop for weed control, green manure, cover crop, honey production and with a 10-12 weeks frost-free growing period it can produce buckwheat grain.

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Tips on Growing Buckwheat

- Buckwheat will not make anyone a fortune big or small, but it can have a place in some cropping programs. The attached budget gives an estimate of the costs of growing buckwheat. Individual growers may not incur some of these costs. The following are a few points to consider when deciding whether to grow Buckwheat:
- The most lucrative market is export to Pacific rim countries -- particularly Japan. It is used for food, duck feed and seed for local planting. There are small markets for buckwheat grain, but most contracts are filled for the 2000 crop year. Price generally ranges from $6 to $9 per bushel.
- Grain can be used for livestock feed on a limited inclusion in the ration. The buckwheat grain can be fed up to 1/3 of the grain concentrate portion of the beef or dairy ration. More recent swine feeding research with newer varieties of Buckwheat found that the overall performance of growing-finishing pigs was comparable to pigs fed cereal grains. However, the price of buckwheat is not as economical as feeding cereals. Feeding the fodder whether fresh or dried can have toxic effects. The primary toxic effect is a photosensitization in animals exposed to the sun that have exposed or light-colored skin including cattle, goats, sheep, swine, and turkey. Less often, but a secondary toxic effect is jaundice.
- If growing for a cover crop or green manure do not let it go to seed. For best results, kill off the buckwheat with 7-10 days of flowering before seed matures.
- Buckwheat is easily killed by frost and requires 10 to 12 weeks frost-free

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growing season to produce grain. Therefore for grain production, buckwheat usually should be planted in mid May to early June at 1/2 to 1 bushel per acre. Later plantings can be used for weed control, plow down and green manure. For seed sources, see the list of Cover Crop Seed Suppliers at: http://www.gov.on.ca/OMAFRA/english/crops/resource/covercrp.htm

- Buckwheat will grow on a wide range of soil types, but prefers well-drained soils with a pH of 5.0 to 7.0. It is intolerant of droughty, saturated or compacted soils. Buckwheat is sensitive to residues from the triazine, sulfonylurea and trifluralin herbicides. Avoid following soybeans, canola or sunflowers as buckwheat is very susceptible to white mold.
- Fertility level should be similar to what would be used for oats -- be careful on the nitrogen as buckwheat is prone to lodging with high soil nitrogen. For grain production the maximum rate of nitrogen is 35 kg/ha in Southern Ontario and 55 kg/ha in Northern Ontario. For further fertility recommendations see the Minor Crops section of the Ontario Field Crop Recommendations, Publication 296.
- No broadleaf herbicides are registered for use. Poast can be used for control of some annual grasses. Maximum rate is 0.56 litres per acre (1.4 l/ha) and should be applied at least 84 days prior to harvest.
- There are three flower sets with buckwheat. Bees are required for good pollination and seed set.
- Swathing should take place when 75% of the seeds are brown on the middle of the plant. If you don't swath and try to combine direct, there will be large losses due to shattering.
- The combine cylinder speed should be slowed down from that used for cereal grains and the air should be cut back.
- Yields will vary depending on pollination and whether summer heat caused any blasting of the seeds. 20-30 bushels per acre could be anticipated but ranges from 5 to 50 are not uncommon.

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Buckwheat Grain Budget

		$/bushel	$/acre		Your Budget
Yield (bu/ac)	25				
Price ($/bu)	$6.53				
Gross Revenue				**$163.34**	
Seed			$22.00		
Fertilizer			$25.35		
Herbicides	Poast@ 0.56 l/ac		$18.40		
	Merge@ 0.4 l/ac		$3.84		
				$69.59	
Cultivation 2X ($4.40/pass)			$8.80		
Planting (drill)			$9.00		
Spray			$7.00		
Swathing			$7.00		
Combining			$25.00		
Drying Charges @$/bu		$0.25	$6.25		
Costs Before Land Costs				$132.64	
Net Before Land Costs				**$30.69**	
Land Charge (rent/interest)			$25.00		
Total Costs				**$157.64**	
Net Income				**$5.69**	
Break Price ($/bu)		***$6.31***			

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